

Indiana House of Representatives

News and Information

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SMITH: GOV. DANIELS IS HURTING EDUCATION IN INDIANA

INDIANAPOLIS -- State Rep. Vernon G. Smith (D-Gary) is appalled by Gov. Mitch Daniels' apparent lack of concern for the state of education in Indiana. Not only has the governor frozen spending for the next two years for all Indiana school districts, but he is also cutting funding by \$52 million over the course of the 2005 calendar year.

"I do not understand how Gov. Daniels thinks he can fix the current state of affairs in Indiana by cutting education funding," said Smith. "By hurting our schools and our children, Gov. Daniels is handicapping the one resource on which Indiana's future depends."

In Smith's district alone the cuts amount to almost \$1.3 million. Lake Ridge Schools will lose \$118,092; Lake Station Community schools' loss will be \$75,179; the school district of the city of Hobart will be out \$188,821; and the River Forest Community School Corporation will lose \$72,265. The Gary Community School Corporation's budget will be short \$829,375.

The funding shortage is not all that Indiana school districts have to worry about. Gov. Daniels also wants to eliminate minimum funding guarantees, which would end up unfairly penalizing schools with declining populations. Rural and urban school districts will be particularly hard hit.

The minimum funding guarantees make sure that all school districts, even if their enrollment is dropping, will receive a certain amount of funding. By removing these guarantees, some school districts will be forced into making uncomfortable decisions in order to stay solvent. Teachers will lose jobs, class sizes will increase, and programs will be cut.

"Not only will children from low-income families be disadvantaged economically, but they will also be disadvantaged academically," said Smith. "The suburban schools, with their burgeoning populations and broad local tax base, will in effect be taking money from needier school districts. How are urban and rural districts supposed to increase their test scores if they are sitting in packed classrooms in a rundown, unequipped school building?"

Further funding setbacks would occur if House Bill 1009 is passed. This bill would divert some funds from the capitol improvement fund for traditional public schools to charter schools. Gov. Daniels supports this initiative as well.

"If we want to improve the school system in Indiana, we need to focus all of our attention and resources on the public schools," said Smith. "Charter schools already receive funding from private sources and public school funds are in dire circumstances. House Bill 1009 would only worsen the situation of traditional public schools in Indiana."

"Our children deserve the best we have to offer them," he said. "How can you look in a child's face and say that his or her future is less important than balancing the budget?"